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The Place and Work of the Prophets in the Catholic Church

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BY THE
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HON. CANON OF CHESTER

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THESE "Notes" were compiled for my own information on a subject concerning which I was deeply interested, but profoundly ignorant.

They are printed in hope that they may be of some use to others in the study of what is quite commonly reckoned the last chapter in the history of the wonderful gift of Prophecy.

It may be also that they will suggest to others, as to me, that the last chapter of that history has not yet been written; and that, possibly, the time has come when the gift, unrecognised or neglected, but still existent, should be realised, and cultivated afresh for the edification of the Church and the conversion of the World.

THE PLACE AND WORK OF THE PROPHETS IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

CHAPTER I

Is it necessary to accentuate the fact that Prophecy did not finally cease when the Canon of the Old Testament was determined; that the great link between the Old and New Testaments is Prophecy?

There were Prophets among the Jews at the period of the coming of the Christ.¹ To their High Priests was expressly attributed the gift of Prophecy.²

And as the great Act of the Holy Spirit in the Incarnation drew nearer, so the atmosphere seemed charged with tenser spiritual forces for the faithful who watched and waited.

¹ Josephus, Ant. xiii. 299, 311, xv. 4; S. John xi. 51. The title seems to be based solely on their power of prediction.

■ The High Priest represented the divine headship of the Jews, and it was through him that an inspired decision was given on questions of doubt; the true Priest is, as Philo says, a Prophet. Westcott, Note on S. John xi. 51. *Compare* Ex. xxviii. 30; Num. xxvii. 31; 1 Sam. xxii. 9, xxx. 7; Ezra ii. 63.

These forces centred round the coming of the Christ.

Before the birth of John the Baptist, the appointed forerunner, Zacharias prophesied,¹ and his prophecy is chronicled as part of the Christian record.

Immediately before the birth of our blessed Lord Elisabeth prophesied,² and Simeon received a special revelation "by the Holy Spirit."

Anna was a Prophetess, and had received a similar revelation.³

John the Baptist is proclaimed by our blessed Lord Himself as the greatest, as he was also the last, of the Old Testament Prophets.⁴

The people expected a Prophet.⁵ All held John the Baptist to be a Prophet.⁶

The multitudes readily accepted our Lord as a Prophet.⁷ The woman of Samaria said: "Sir, I perceive that thou art a Prophet."⁸ A large proportion of His earthly ministry was distinctly prophetic.⁹ We still own Him as our Prophet, as well as our Priest and King.

And all this is put on record many years afterwards by the several Evangelists, without any special comment, any expression of surprise.

There was, in fact, nothing surprising about it; nothing of the unexpected.

Prophecy was to be looked for in the preparation

¹ S. Luke i. 67. ² S. Luke i. 41, ii. 26. ³ S. Luke ii. 36.

⁴ S. Luke vii. 28. ⁵ S. John i. 21. ⁶ S. Matt. xiv. 5.

⁷ S. Matt. xxi. 11; S. John vi. 14, vii. 40, 46, ix. 17.

⁸ S. John iv. 19. ⁹ S. John iii. 1-5; S. Luke xxiv. 19.

for the Kingdom of Christ, and surely in that Kingdom itself. For the Kingdom of Heaven was to be the domain of the Holy Spirit. Its members were to be born of water and of the Spirit. And if Prophecy was the highest of the spiritual charismata, it could not be omitted among the manifestations of its coming, much less from the Kingdom when it came.

It would have been strange indeed if, in a Church which claimed to be so much more spiritual than that which preceded it, as Spirit is compared with Letter, or the Baptism of the Holy Ghost to the baptism with water only, the members should be lacking in the one manifestation of the Spiritual Life which was recognised by every one as stamped with the seal of Divine power.¹

But to us the words of the Lord Himself must be of chief importance.

What did He say bearing upon the existence of Prophets and Prophecy in the Church He was about to found ?

In the first place, may we not presume that He regarded them as having their natural place in the Church of the New Testament as they had in that of the Old ?

Do not His words imply this ?

“He that receiveth a Prophet in the name of a Prophet, shall receive a Prophet’s reward.”²
 “Behold I send unto you Prophets, some of them

¹ 2 S. Peter i. 21.

² S. Matt. x. 41.

ye shall kill.”¹ “It cannot be that a Prophet perish out of Jerusalem.”²

And in the next place may we not gather that He discerned in the Prophets of the New Testament, as in those of the Old, elements in some respects too uncertain and too unreliable to maintain a permanent place in the system of a Church which was to be so richly, as well as so universally, endowed with spiritual gifts? Why else should He say: “Beware of false Prophets . . . By their fruits ye shall know them.”³ “Many shall say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Thy Name? Then I will profess unto them, I never knew you.”⁴ “Many false Prophets shall arise, and lead many astray, . . . if possible the elect.”⁵ Or again: “There shall arise false Christs, and false Prophets, and shall shew signs and wonders, that they may lead astray . . . if possible, the elect.”⁶

And thirdly, must we not take into consideration that these words were bound to affect the view which the early Church took of Prophets and Prophecy, and by the fact of their fulfilment may have helped to lead to the otherwise almost inexplicable modification or restriction of gifts so great and wonderful?

¹ S. Matt. xxiii. 34. ² S. Luke xiii. 33.

³ S. Matt. vii. 15, 16. ⁴ S. Matt. vii. 22, 23.

⁵ S. Matt. xxiv. 11, 24. ⁶ S. Mark xiii. 22.

CHAPTER II

BEFORE proceeding to consider further Prophets and Prophecy as they existed in the earlier period of the Catholic Church, it may be well to summarise briefly what a Prophet was.

It is plain that the same meaning will attach to the name, whether it occurs in the New Testament or in the Old.

The word in Hebrew is "Nabi"; in the Septuagint, "Prophētes"; in the Authorised Version, "Prophet."

The idea to be conveyed by the Hebrew word is that of "Bubbling forth like a fountain."

He is one who speaks for another, especially one who speaks for a god, and so interprets his will to man: essentially he is an "Interpreter."¹

Davidson says:² "The 'Prophētes' in classical Greek is one who speaks for another, the interpreter either of the 'Mantis' or of the god himself; so that he is near akin to the 'Exegētes,' though with a more definite reference to persons than to things. This blending of the two (Prophētes and Mantis),

¹ Meyrick, *Art. Prophet*, Smith's *Dict. of the Bible*.

² *Art. Prophecy*, Hastings' *Dict. of the Bible*.

which practically merges the 'Prophètes' in the 'Mantis,' was a current belief even among Christians (Justin, Athenagoras),¹ in spite of 1 Cor. xiv. 32, till it was partly discredited by Montanist fanaticism; and in our own time it may be traced in every theory of inspiration which fails to realise the full co-operation of the Prophet's understanding."

The full bearing of this quotation will be better appreciated later on.

The Old Testament Prophets, then, were the media of the revelation of GOD. They were the Interpreters of His will to men. They spoke not as they willed, nor what they willed, but as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.² False Prophets were those who spoke the vision of their own hearts, and not out of the mouth of the Lord;³ who prophesied out of their own hearts; who followed their own spirits and had seen nothing.⁴

Prophets generally were divided into two classes. There were the great inspired individuals, "The Prophets" *par excellence*; and a class, or Order, of professional Prophets. This Order was made more important by Samuel, who was also a Priest. He was the reformer and re-organiser of the Prophetic Order, as Moses was the great founder and legislator of the priestly rule.⁵ He instituted Companies

Justin con. Tryph. c. cxv. 342. A. Athenagoras, *Apology*, c. ix. p. 9.

² Num. xi. 17, 25, 29, xxii. 38.

³ Jeremiah xxiii. 16. ⁴ Ezekiel xiii. 2, 3.

⁵ Meyrick, Art. Prophet, Smith's *Dict. of the Bible*.

or Colleges of Prophets, apparently a kind of Theological Colleges, in which the spiritual faculty could be developed and cultivated, by means of a disciplined life, under proper direction, amid devotional surroundings. Various aids towards ecstatic conditions may have been found in music, dancing and singing, or comparison of personal experiences.

A line of official Prophets existed to the close of the Canon of the Old Testament, but was extinct before the coming of the Christ.¹

It must, however, be understood that there were no hard-and-fast limits to the bestowal of the prophetic gift. There might be members of the Prophetic Order to whom the gift of Prophecy was not given; there might be inspired Prophets who did not belong to the Prophetic Order.² The work of the Order was teaching and training, by way of preparation. Generally the inspired Prophet came from the Prophetic Order, but not always.

The Canonical Prophets had the divine call as well as the divine illumination.³

¹ Ab Artexerxe vero usque ad nostrum tempus singula quidem conscripta, non tamen priori simili fide sunt habita, eoquod non fuerit certa successio prophetarum. Joseph. con. Apionem. lib. i. 4. G. Compare 1 Macabees iv. 46, ix. 27, xiv. 41. Ecclesiasticus xxxvi. 15.

² Amos, *passim*.

³ Meyrick, Art. Prophet, Smith's *Dict. of the Bible*.

CHAPTER III

IN what way did the Prophets of the Old Testament receive the Divine Communication ?

Three methods may be fairly distinguished : Direct Communication, Vision, and Dream. The two latter are evidently commonest.¹ The heathen, followed later by the Montanists and the Alexandrian Jews, accepted as Prophecy, Vision, and Unconscious Utterance in a state of ecstasy. This was opposed by the Fathers (Jerome, Origen, Basil and Chrysostom).²

Still, we must acknowledge that a "prophetic trance" is a Scriptural account of the state in which the Prophets and other inspired persons, sometimes at least, received a divine revelation.

The "deep sleep" of Daniel is much rather a "trance," and the somewhat parallel cases of Moses and Isaiah explain what is meant, though not easily expressed.³

This state or condition is accompanied by a Vision and a Voice.⁴

¹ Joel ii. 28 ; Dan. i. 17.

² Meyrick, Art. Prophet, *Smith's Dict. of the Bible*.

³ Compare Ex. xxxiii. 20 ; Num. xxiv. 15, 16 ; Is. vi.

⁴ Dan. viii. 18, 19, 27, x. 7, 9, 10, 11.

The Communication is made by the agency of the Spirit of GOD, and, as we shall see, apparently becomes a more direct Revelation when through the Incarnation mankind is brought into a closer relationship with GOD.

There seems then to have been essentially a super-exaltation of the faculties, a fuller gift of "life" conferred by the Giver of Life upon the inspired individual. His intelligence was quickened, as when Elijah foretold the coming of the Syrians.¹ His eyes saw things beyond the ordinary vision of men, as when Elisha saw the departing of Elijah, and his servant saw the angel host that ensured his master's safety.² His ears heard the words "unspeakable,"³ and his entire person received a "wholeness" which could impart itself to others, as when Elijah restored her child to the woman of Zarephath,⁴ and the contact with the bones of Elisha restored the dead man to life.⁵

And what of the message of which he was the Interpreter? Of course this varied. Sometimes the Prophet spoke words of solemn warning and prediction, as when Samuel told Eli of the downfall of his house, or Nathan rebuked David for his great transgression, or Isaiah spoke to Israel of the judgments which must come upon her for her national apostasy. Sometimes, as in the later Prophets, they spoke of the coming of the Messianic Kingdom,

¹ Compare 1 Kings xx. 22 ; 2 Kings xiii. 19.

² 2 Kings ii. 12, vi. 17. ³ Dan. x. 9.

⁴ 1 Kings xvii. 21. ⁵ 2 Kings xiii. 21.

with its gifts of light and peace, its lasting government, its purified rites ; loving promises rather than terrifying threats form the burden of their message.

But much more general and more important was their work as reformers of Church and State ; as builders, like Moses or Samuel, of a nation or a kingdom.¹

It is true that "prediction," or foretelling of coming events, would always make the greater impression upon the vulgar minds, and in many cases obscure the higher and nobler uses of the gift ; but the fact remains that the Prophet is to be esteemed, not so much as he is the "seer" whose prediction is justified by the event, but rather as the "forth-teller," the chosen and inspired instrument by whom the loving providence of GOD would edify, comfort and guide those on whom He has chosen to place His Name.

¹ "The great Prophets of the early Monarchy are Samuel, Nathan, Elijah, and Elisha. They have one feature in common with later Prophets : they are great national leaders, and religious reformers. They ever sought to guide Israel on high moral and religious lines ; openly rebuking King and people alike ; and representing Jehovah as a righteous GOD Who avenges wrong. These earlier Prophets took an active part in the State ; even deciding who should succeed to the throne. They are Israel's religious and moral saviours ; its spiritual and moral reformers ; and the recognised mouthpieces of GOD in His revelations to man." Cohu. *The Old Testament in the Light of Modern Research*. Pp. 209, 210.

CHAPTER IV

WHAT evidence have we of the existence of Prophets in the Church of the Apostolic age?

In his list of teachers given to the Church at Ephesus S. Paul places them in this order: 1st, Apostles, 2nd, Prophets.¹ And, again, in his 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, 1st, Apostles, 2nd, Prophets.² In other places he ranks the Prophets with the Apostles, and in some measure on a par with them, as the common foundation on which the Church was built.³

S. John puts for Christians generally: Saints, Apostles and Prophets; and elsewhere simply Saints and Prophets.⁴

S. Paul prays for the Corinthian Church two gifts—Wisdom and Prophecy.⁵

Agabus is called a Prophet.⁶ Barnabas, Simeon-Niger, Manaen, and Saul were Prophets.⁷ Philip's daughters prophesied.⁸ Bar-Jesus was a false

¹ Ephes. iv. 11. ² 1 Cor. xii. 28. ³ Eph. ii. 20, iii. 5.

⁴ Rev. xviii. 20, 24. *Compare* xi. 18. ⁵ 1 Cor. xiv. 5.

⁶ Acts xxi. 10. ⁷ Acts xiii. 1. ⁸ Acts xxi. 9.

Prophet.¹ Judas and Silas were Prophets.² S. John calls his book the "Word of Prophecy."³

But the fact is not really in question. It is rather the place and work of Prophets in the Catholic Church with which we are concerned. In the New Testament, as in the Old, the source of prophetic power was the inspiration by the Spirit of God.⁴ The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost naturally conveyed to the Apostles, amongst other gifts, the gift of Prophecy.⁵ So the Apostles were, *ipso facto*, also Prophets. And the gifts of the Spirit conveyed to others by the "laying on of hands" of the Apostles embraced among them the gift of Prophecy.

But was this particular gift conferred by them in every case?

It is a little difficult at times to discriminate in a condition of the Church which was altogether exceptional and abnormal. Under the influence of the copious outpouring of the Spirit the Church was like a glowing perfervid mass. It existed in a constant glow of excitation; all, or nearly all, received some special spiritual gifts. These were no longer exceptional or extraordinary, but were poured out upon all flesh; even upon slaves and handmaidens. The community lived in a state of ecstasy, or spiritual excitement.⁶ Jewish and

¹ Acts xiii. 6.

² Acts xv. 32.

³ Rev. i. 3, xxii. 7, 10, 18, 19.

⁴ Acts ii. 16, 17, 18.

⁵ Acts xix. 6.

⁶ Compare Acts ii. 44, &c., iv. 24, &c., 31, 32, x. 44.

Gentile Churches at their birth enjoyed a like endowment of the Spirit.¹ It was confined to no class. Rackham seems to think that the gift of the Spirit was always followed by prophetic phenomena, as in the case of Cornelius; that some would possess the gift in higher degree than their fellows; others would specially devote their lives to the exercise of Prophecy. In either case they would be called "Prophets"; but it was those who possessed the gift most abundantly who ranked next to the Apostles.²

On the other hand, S. Paul's words³ cannot be passed over, and they certainly seem to point to some qualification. "To one," he says, "is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit, to another the gift of healing by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another Prophecy," etc.⁴ All these and their working he likens to members of the body, many, yet one; differing in office, yet all making for the edifying of the body. And then he distinctly asks for an implied negative answer: "Are all Prophets?"

In another place he exhorts them earnestly to desire spiritual gifts, but especially the gift of Prophecy. And that because "greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues"; evidently

¹ Acts x. 45, 46.

² Rackham, *Westminster Commentaries*, Acts, p. xciv., &c.

³ 1 Cor. xii. 7, *seq.*

⁴ 1 Cor. xii. 29.

distinguishing between the possessors of the several gifts.¹

It may be, of course, that by this time (c. A.D. 55) the first glow of spiritual fervour had settled down to a more normal state, and that the vessels of divine grace had adopted more perfectly the special gifts intended for their individual work or office.

But in any case we should be disposed to say that, if in the first outpouring of the Spirit in superabundant fullness some special purpose was fulfilled by conferring almost universally on the infant Church the gift of Prophecy, the occasion was only temporary, and for a very limited period.

We find Prophets, great inspired men, answering to the greater Prophets of the Old Testament; and we find a kind of "Prophetic Order," Bands or Companies of Prophets, corresponding perhaps to the schools of the Prophets of the older dispensation;² and, although a "revelation" might come as occasion needed to any one of these,³ the Prophets, as such, were to be clearly distinguished from the other orders of ministry with which they are sometimes associated in the Acts and the Epistles.

¹ I Cor. xiv. 1-6, 39.

² Acts xi. 27, 28, xiii. 1, xx. 23, xxi. 4, 9, &c. *Compare*
I Cor. xi. 4, 5, xiv. 29, 30, 31, 2 Cor. viii. 7, I Thess. v. 19, 20.

³ I Cor. xiv. 26.]

CHAPTER V

It being understood, then, that there was in the Apostolic Church, as in the Jewish Church, no hard-and-fast limit to the exercise of the prophetic gift, while still the office and work of the Prophet was, and tended during the first century to become more and more, distinct, we may go on to consider in what respects the New Testament Prophets may be compared with those of the Old Testament.

And first, as to the way in which the Prophet received the divine communication.

The same distinction may be marked in both cases : *i.e.*, Revelation, Vision, and Dream.

Stanley says that "the most ordinary mode through which the word of the Lord, as far as we can trace, came, was through a divine impulse given to the Prophet's own thought."¹

S. Paul distinguishes "Revelation" from "Vision."²

It is probable that the most common development of the gift, whether in prediction, exposition, or in direct appeal, was a form of spiritual insight

¹ Stanley's *Jewish Church*, p. 426.

² 2 Cor. xii. 1.

acting upon the mind, and finding its expression in fitting speech.¹

But the conditions of ecstasy or "trance" are very marked.² They are to be found in the incidents of S. Paul's conversion.³ The "Light," the "falling to the earth," the "Voice" are all notable in this connection,⁴ and his own account of his vision corresponds exactly with this.⁵

The vision of Cornelius may also be noted;⁶ and the case of S. Peter is, on his own showing, distinctly of the same ecstatic character;⁷ while the later revelation of S. Paul at Jerusalem must surely fall within the same category⁸ as the spiritual experiences of the Old Testament Prophets.

But the greatest example of this must always, of course, be "The Revelation of S. John the Divine." There the conditions noted in Daniel are plainly and definitely seen. The trance, the voice, the vision, the prone position of the subject, the touch, the revelation, are all present.⁹

Perhaps the method of revelation by dream is not so definitely expressed; but it is none the less quite clearly signified. The prophecy of Joel is not qualified in S. Peter's quotation, "your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams."¹⁰ Dream, to the first Christian disciples, would be as likely a method for the coming of the

¹ S. Luke xxi. 14, 15.

² Compare S. Luke ix. 32-36.

³ Acts ix. 2, *seq.*

⁴ Compare Dan. x. 1-3, 30, 5-10.

⁵ 2 Cor. xii. 4.

⁶ Acts x. 1-3, 30.

⁷ Acts xi. 5.

⁸ Acts xxii. 17, &c.

⁹ Rev. i. 10, *seq.*

¹⁰ Acts ii. 17.

word of the Lord, as to the Jews, to whose forefathers, Jacob,¹ Joseph,² and Solomon,³ He had thus spoken.

It was, moreover, a divinely chosen method, specially attached to the gift of Prophecy.⁴

There would be nothing unusual to those who knew so well the story of S. Joseph's dream,⁵ or the dream of Pilate's wife,⁶ in such an expression of the divine will.

So the revelation came to S. Paul (as to Daniel) "in the night" to tell him of his future mission to Rome;⁷ and again to forewarn and encourage him when the wreck of the ship in which he sailed was imminent.⁸

There is, therefore, so far as we can see, no apparent difference between the methods by which the divine word was communicated to the Prophets of the New Testament and to those of the Old, unless it be that under the fuller dispensation of the Holy Spirit in the Catholic Church, direct revelation, or the direct impulse given by the Spirit to the Prophet's own thoughts, was the more frequent and normal method, and that revelation by trance or dream was rather the exception than the rule.

¹ Gen. xxi. 10.

² Gen. xxxvii. 5.

³ 1 Kings iii. 5.

⁴ Num. xii. 6.

⁵ S. Matt. ii. 12.

⁶ S. Matt. xxvii. 19.

⁷ Acts xxiii. 11.

⁸ Acts xxvii. 23.

CHAPTER VI

WHAT was the special function or office of the Prophets in the Church of Christ ?

They are frequently mentioned by S. Paul with the Apostles, and as second to them, and to them alone.

The gift bestowed upon them is described as the most excellent and most profitable of all spiritual gifts.

Bishop Cotterill says : " The Prophet is not merely one who predicts future events, but one who has immediate communion with Him in Whom are all things, past, present, and future ; and possesses both a spiritual insight into divine truth, and the power of expounding this truth in the language of the children of men." ¹

Dr. Döllinger says : " These gifts were peculiarly serviceable for the community. The Prophet, exhorting and consoling, in clear, intelligible language, spoke something designed for all ; he understood the needs of his hearers, and brought to light what lay hidden in the heart. If he did not always know the full significance of his own utterances, others

¹ Bp. Cotterill, *Genesis of the Church*, p. 330.

understood it all the better. Prophecy benefited believers.”¹

It is clear that prediction, though a power sometimes given to the Prophet, was not his distinctive function. This was rather an inspiration, finding utterance in exhortation, instruction, encouragement and exposition of the Scriptures; aids now mostly conveyed by means of preaching.²

Meyrick quotes Locke as saying: “Prophecy comprehends three things: prediction, singing by the dictation of the Spirit, and explaining the mysterious, hidden sense of Scripture by an illumination of the Spirit;”³ and adds, that it is by virtue of this last signification of the word that the Prophets of the New Testament are so called. This would appear to be a limitation scarcely justified by the evidence;⁴ indeed, it is hardly in accordance with his own words, when he says elsewhere, “Predictive powers occasionally existed, as in the case of Agabus,⁵ but were not a characteristic of the New Testament Prophets. They were not an Order, like Apostles, Presbyters or Bishops and Deacons, but they were men and women who

¹ Dr. Döllinger, *The First Age of the Church*, Vol. II, 152, 153.

² Rackham, *Westminster Commentaries*, Acts, p. xciv., &c.

³ Locke, Paraphrase of 1 Cor. xii, p. 121.

⁴ Meyrick, Art. Prophet, *Smith's Dict. of the Bible*. See also: Payne Smith's *Bampton Lectures*, 1869. Prophecy a Preparation for Christ, pp. 30, 38, 109, and 109 note. Kirkpatrick, *Warburton Lectures*, 1886-1890. The Doctrine of the Prophets. Spence, *The Teaching of the Apostles*, Excursus 7.

⁵ Acts xi. 28.

had the 'charisma prophēteias' given them. If men, they might at the same time be Apostles;¹ and there was nothing to hinder the different 'charismata' of wisdom, knowledge, faith, teaching, miracle, prophecy, discernment, and interpretation of tongues, being all accumulated on one person, and this person might or might not be a Presbyter."²

"S. Paul describes Prophecy as being effective for the conversion, apparently the sudden and immediate conversion, of unbelievers; and for the instruction and consolation of believers.³ It was a spiritual gift which enabled men to understand and to teach the truths of Christianity, especially as veiled in the Old Testament, and to exhort and warn with authority and effect greater than human."⁴

But we must emphasise the point, that the special gift of spiritual insight into the hearts and minds of their hearers must be added to their powers as supernaturally illuminated expounders and preachers if we are to form any adequate idea of the power and influence of the Prophets of the Apostolic Church.⁵

Gwatkin agrees that Prophets are naturally cited more or less from the side of prediction, but that "the Prophet's proper work is rather edification and consolation;⁶ revealing the secrets of the hidden life, and incidentally converting unbelievers; though, strictly speaking, Prophecy is a sign for believers."⁷

¹ I Cor. xiv. 18.

² I Cor. xii.

³ I Cor. xiv. 24, 31.

⁴ Meyrick, Art. Prophet, Smith's *Dict. of the Bible*.

⁵ I Cor. xiv. 25. ⁶ I Cor. iv. 3, 24, 25. ⁷ I Cor. xiv. 22.

And because the Prophet edifies the Church, not only himself, Prophecy is a better gift than that of tongues, and more earnestly to be coveted, though still but a transitory gift,¹ not abiding like Faith, Hope, and Love.”²

Dr. Bright’s estimate does not seem to rise much above that of inspired preaching when he says: “In the Apostolic age the preaching or proclaiming of the Gospel was part of the ordinary functions of Apostles in the first instance; and under them of Evangelists, and of Pastors and Teachers; yet the exercise of the gift of prophesying was open, under needful safeguards against disorder, to all who possessed it; and to this fact (neglecting the safeguards) the Montanists appealed in the second half of the second century under the erroneous assumption that it warranted the subsequent utterances by which they compromised the great name of spiritual freedom.”³

On the whole, in this aspect of New Testament Prophecy, its power seems to have lain, as we have said of that of the Old, in the spiritual exaltation of the whole man, by the added power conferred on him by the life-giving Spirit. His intelligence and imagination were quickened, so that he foretold the future issue of present events. His senses were

¹ 1 Cor. xiii. 8.

² Hastings’ *Dict. of the Bible*. Art. Prophets in the New Test. Selwyn, *The Christian Prophets*, 1900.

³ Dr. Bright, *Some Aspects of Primitive Church Life*, p. 71, note.

made capable of seeing and hearing the sights and sounds of the world, to others outside the range of sense. His quickened insight pierced the outer crust of men's character, and revealed the hidden man. In his clearer atmosphere, rising at times above the ordinary level of human wisdom, he saw distinctly the bearing of GOD's work in and for man, as revealed in the records of Holy Scripture ; and the mystery of the Incarnation, and the work of the Christ, lay plain before him. His speech, too, became such as could resolve mysteries into intelligible form, and bring home to the minds of his hearers the message of Him by Whom and for Whom he spoke. He is indeed GOD's interpreter, reproving, exhorting, comforting, guiding and convincing as the Church required, and as the loving providence of GOD directed him.

CHAPTER VII

THERE is one office of the Prophets of the Christian Church which, in relation to the Church as a whole, *i.e.*, as distinct from their work in individual cases, or as speakers in the congregation, is specially noted in the New Testament record.

They seem to have acted as a kind of spiritual consultants, on occasion, as to procedure in questions of Church policy, and the choice of proper instruments for carrying it out. In Acts xiii. 2 we read of the school or band of Prophets at Antioch, that they were Fasting and Ministering to the Lord.

Certainly it would seem that the Fasting and Ministering were connected, and that the occasion was a special one, having a specific purpose. The sequel, too, points to the fact that they were seeking a special inspiration or guidance as to the extension of the Church, and the method and means by which that extension should be carried out.

The response of the Holy Spirit was conveyed in the order that Barnabas and Saul were to be separated for the work; and they, the Prophets, with further Fasting and Prayer and Laying on of Hands, confer on the two Apostles the spiritual gifts which

were necessary for their support and guidance in their new and special work.

Under the control of this spiritual direction they set forth to Seleucia. The same spiritual guidance was given them throughout, directly or indirectly, ordering their journeys, and inspiring their words ;¹ certainly at times through the means of men of prophetic gifts.²

It seems equally certain that something of the same kind took place in the appointment of Ministers to important posts, such as Overseers or Bishops, perhaps in quite the earliest stages of the Church's life ; certainly when the local episcopate as we know it was beginning to assume a definite form.

The choice of S. Timothy for the Bishopric of Ephesus, as well as the spiritual gifts for his office, were due to prophecies and Prophets.³ Prophets had selected him, and declared his qualifications for the post. The Presbyters who laid their hands upon him may quite well have been the same Prophets, acting after Fasting and Prayer, as in the case before cited of SS. Barnabas and Saul.

Whether S. Paul reckoned himself among the Prophets who thus acted, when he speaks of the gift of God which was in S. Timothy by the putting on of "the hands of the presbytery,"⁴ may be open to doubt. The expression, "laying on of my hands," may quite well refer to a separate and special Apostolic commission, or consecration.⁵

¹ Acts xvi. 7, xviii. 5, xx. 22.

² Acts xxi. 4.

³ 1 Tim. i. 18.

⁴ 1 Tim. iv. 14.

⁵ 2 Tim. i. 6.

But we may certainly conclude that the importance of the office we have been noting as attached to the Prophetic Order, in some respects coinciding with that of the Prophets of the Old Testament, and affecting the very foundations of the Church itself, fully accounts for the high position they held, second only to the Apostles, and reckoned with them as bases on which the beginnings of that Church were laid.

CHAPTER VIII

WERE these outpourings of spiritual fervour to be received without any qualifications, or were there conditions attached to the utterances and conduct of the Prophets by which the value of their utterances was to be estimated ?

In the first place, we remember that the Prophets were second in rank to the Apostles, and were subject to Apostolic Authority.

The gift of "discerning of spirits" was also to be exercised carefully in every case.¹ S. John found it necessary even in his time to "try the spirits, whether they are of GOD."² S. Paul, speaking of the disorders which had apparently arisen among the Prophets at Corinth, makes the recognition of his Apostolic Authority to settle disputed matters a test of the true prophetic gift. "If any man thinketh himself to be a Prophet or Spiritual, let him acknowledge of the things that I write unto you that they are the commandments of the Lord."³ While every one, then, taught in the Church who had the capacity for public speaking, the matter of his teaching was always subject to the judgment

¹ 1 Cor. xii. 10. ² 1 S. John iv. 1. ³ 1 Cor. xiv. 37.

of the Apostles, and of those who had the gift of discerning of spirits.

Secondly, in every case, the spirit of the Prophets was subject to the Prophets themselves.¹

They did not allow themselves to be torn in pieces by an involuntary inspiration, nor fell into an ecstasy which drowned their consciousness, nor a delirious enthusiasm ; but they retained freedom of thought and will ; and when speaking in public could break off at any moment.

Among the Prophets at Corinth there had arisen manifest disorders. Women prophesied in the congregation with their heads unveiled. The Prophets spoke confusedly, and all together. S. Paul reminds them that GOD is not the author of confusion but of peace ; and that all things must be done decently and in order.

Each member of the congregation may have a revelation (or at all events, each of those having the gift of Prophecy) ; but the Prophets are to speak by two or three, and the rest are to discern. All may prophesy, but they must prophesy one by one ; that all may learn, and all may be comforted.²

It is plain, then, that the Prophet who spoke "*en pneumati*" must have his human spirit in full activity, and so be able steadily to control the gifts of the Spirit, that in no case was he a mere unconscious instrument, and that he was quite able to speak only in proportion to the faith that

¹ 1 Cor. xiv. 32.

² 1 Cor. xiv. 24, *seq.*

was in him.¹ There must, in the case of the true Prophet, be no failing of self-restraint. There must, as Davidson says, be no failure to realise, "with the inspiration, the full co-operation of the Prophet's understanding."

And, thirdly, "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of Prophecy."²

S. Paul writes to the Thessalonians: "Despise not prophesyings; prove all things;"³ and elsewhere supplies the test; "No man speaking by the Spirit of GOD calleth Jesus anathema; and no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost."⁴

And the same words (perhaps a formula set forth by authority for the very purpose) are used by S. John: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are of GOD. Because many false Prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know we the spirit of GOD: every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of GOD: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is not of GOD, and this is the spirit of AntiChrist."⁵

It is plain that the possession of this great gift in some cases might lead to personal pride, or self-advertisement; and did actually from the very first prove a temptation to many; that others would be led to feign ecstasy, or to allow their spiritual

¹ Rom. xii. 6, R.V. our faith. Margin, or the faith.

² Rev. xix. 10. ³ 1 Thess. v. 20. ⁴ 1 Cor. xii. 3.

⁵ 1 S. John iv. 1-3.

fervour to outrun their reason, and their mental powers. But also that, against this, was balanced the Apostolic Authority, with the gift of "discerning the spirits," and the condition, that no Prophet must be carried beyond the limits of self-restraint and intelligent action. Above all, that if the prophetic office were assumed by any, there could be no question as to their falsity, if the message they professed to convey were anything else than a witness to Jesus.

The word indeed could not be the word of the Spirit of Truth, proceeding from the Father, unless it bore testimony to the Son.¹

But, with these limitations or conditions, the liberty of the true Prophet was very great.

The Apostles had their own "commission." They were the witnesses who had been with Jesus from the beginning.² Especially were they the chosen witnesses of His Resurrection.³ To them had been committed the chief authority in the Kingdom of God; ⁴ and they had received the details of its organisation from the lips of its Founder.⁵ There was but one Apostolic "office"; that derived from Christ Himself.⁶ The superadded Apostleship created by the supernatural interposition of the Holy Ghost, was undoubtedly co-ordinate with

¹ S. John xv. 25.

² S. John xv. 27; Acts i. 8.

³ Acts i. 22.

⁴ S. Matt. xviii. 18; S. John xx. 22, 23; S. Matt. xix. 28; S. Luke xxii. 29, 30.

⁵ Acts i. 3.

⁶ Acts i. 4, 8.

that which was derived otherwise from Jesus Christ. In the settled order of the Church all other orders of ministers were subject to them. It is the Apostles and Presbyters, not the Apostles and Prophets, who were to decide controversies. Nor is there any evidence to prove that the possession of spiritual gifts, such as those of a Prophet, invested a man with any spiritual charge such as that committed to Presbyters, or, afterwards, to Bishops.

But still, the "power" that made the Church a living, pulsating body was the endowment with the Holy Spirit for which even the Apostles had prayed and waited, and in whatever member of the body this power was found, or whatever his state and office, such tribute of attention and respect was paid to it as was due to such a marvellous gift of God.

For instance, to their work of convincing unbelievers, comforting believers, edifying the Church, convincing the doubtful, solving difficulties, interpreting the Scriptures, building up the national life of the new Israel, the Kingdom of God, must be added another privilege of the Prophet not very easy to classify.

When he was present, he might act as President of divine service.¹

¹ "But permit the Prophets to give thanks in such terms as they please." *Teaching of the Apostles*, c. x. See also Excursus 2. "When our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought and the president in like manner offers prayer and thanksgivings according to his ability." Justin Mart, *Apology*, c. lxvii.

In our mention of the Prophets at Antioch, it was noted that they were seeking divine guidance at a crisis of the Church's history, and were "ministering" to the Lord. The word used excludes the idea of any private act, and must certainly apply to the whole of divine service in the Church. Fasting and Prayer point to the fact of a service of which teaching and preaching also most probably formed a part. But the centre of that service was beyond doubt the Lord's Supper, or Eucharist. The Prophet, then, was also a "leitourgos," or one who conducted the Liturgy.

S. Paul calls himself a "leitourgos"; and while there must certainly have been some "canon," or essential fixed part, which stamped the character of the service, to the Prophets was given the liberty, long after continued, of using such other prayers and thanksgivings as under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit they might be moved to utter.

CHAPTER IX

It is quite easily to be gathered that Prophecy was rather a spiritual condition than an office, however convenient the use of that term may be.

The Prophet was not one of an "Order" in the same sense as a Deacon or a Presbyter or an Apostle.

The fact that the Apostles were, and the Presbyters and Deacons might be, also Prophets, establishes this.

But while certain "Orders" or offices were certainly destined to be perpetuated in the Church, we must conclude that the supernatural action of the Holy Spirit manifested in the Prophets of the Apostolic Church, as distinct from other gifted members, as well as His action in the lower or physical sphere, in the case of miracles, was only temporary, and suited for a transitional period of the Church's life.

Bishop Cotterill says : " As the human testimony to the life, death, and resurrection of our blessed Lord was supplied by the Apostles ; so these special spiritual gifts were added as a strong corroboration of the supernatural facts to which the Apostles testified. They were proofs of their divine mission,

and that the origin of the revelation conveyed by them was divine. They witnessed to the fulfilment of the promise of Christ, and to the presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church. They set the seal of GOD to the actions and teaching of the Church, so long as there was need for such evidence ; until, that is, the Church had approved itself to the moral consciousness of reasonable men, and was above the need of evidence which appealed to a lower phase of man's nature." He even goes further than this, and declares "that supernatural powers prevent the rational faculties of man from having perfectly full play ; inasmuch as these powers are, more or less, interruptions of those sequences of cause and effect, by which reason proves conclusions for the guidance of man ; for in that which is supernatural, effects follow causes out of their known and accustomed order. Whether, therefore, we consider supernatural powers in regard to the spiritual being of man, or to his rational faculties, we find that they are unsuitable for the perfection of either ; and therefore we might conclude with certainty, that in the Kingdom of Christ, which was in the highest degree to be adapted for men, they would not be continued longer than was necessary." ¹

On this point, that Prophecy as it existed in the first age of the Church was not intended to be permanent, there is a general agreement of opinion.

¹ Bp. Cotterill's *Genesis of the Church*, p. 423. Dr. Döllinger's *First Age of the Church*, pp. 157, 158. Rackham, *Acts*, p. xciv.

These gifts are not mentioned in the Pastoral Epistles as forming any part whatever of the Church's system. There might be "prophetic men," but as a special class, "the Prophets" passed away. This special supernatural action of the Spirit was exercised for establishing the Church in its completeness. "It died away as the permanent order of the Church became developed. The Church, which is the body of Jesus Christ, was first formed through the supernatural action of the Spirit; but, being formed, it was to grow through the power of the spiritual forces which it contains, according to the universal laws of development. The genesis of the Church, like that of the physical universe, was effected not without divine interposition; but, when all things were constituted in order, creative acts were no longer needed."

The place of the Prophets was taken by teachers and preachers of special power and capacity; their special gifts were re-absorbed into the permanent order of the Church. The special gift might still exist, we know indeed that it did, and it was not to be despised but encouraged.¹ Still the spirit must be carefully "tested." Prophecy was not what it once had been. The power of God must not be called in question; but it was recognised that the time was passed which called for this special concentration of spiritual powers upon a separate class of individuals in the case of the Catholic Church.

¹ 1 Thess. v. 20.

CHAPTER X

SINCE, however, the gift of "Prophecy" existed in some sort so late as the period marked by the Epistles of S. John, we should expect to find some mention of it in the writers of the period immediately following.

In the Epistle of Barnabas¹ the word "Prophet," or "Prophets," occurs twenty times, always in connection with the Old Testament Scriptures.

But there is one passage which may possibly allude to the New Testament gift of Prophecy :

"He Himself prophesies within us ; He Himself dwelleth with us, and openeth to us who were in the bondage of death, the gate of our temple : that is the mouth of wisdom. . . . He therefore that desires to be saved looketh not unto the man, but unto Him that dwelleth in him, and speaketh by him : being struck with wonder, forasmuch as he never heard him speaking such words out of his mouth, nor ever desired to hear them ; this is that spiritual temple that is built unto the Lord."²

¹ A.D. 90-100 C.

² *Epistula Barnabae*, Ed. Hinrichs, Lipsiae, 1878, xvi. 8, 9, 10.

The allusion may be obscure, but it is difficult to associate the words "being struck with wonder, etc.," with any of the ordinary ministrations of the Church.

The allusions to the Prophets in the 1st Epistle of Clement¹ are always to those of the Old Testament. But it has not unreasonably been suggested that the acts of insubordination against certain Corinthian elders, which gave occasion for the Epistle, were quite probably caused or fomented by unruly Prophets or Prophetesses at Corinth, who, not for the first time, had proved unamenable to Apostolic order.

In the 2nd Epistle,² there is one passage which may be taken as a direct allusion to the Prophets of the New Testament: "And ye know that the Prophets and Apostles teach that the Church is not of this present world, but from above."³

¹ A.D. 97 C.

² A.D. 147 C.

³ 2 Ep. of Clement xiv. 2, Dr. Burton's Translation.

CHAPTER XI

WHEN we come to read "The Shepherd" of Hermae,¹ we are at once struck with its unmistakable prophetic character.

By the introductory expressions, "I fell asleep . . . and the Spirit caught me away, and carried me through a lofty place. . . . Falling down . . . I began to pray . . . I saw, etc.," we are forcibly reminded of the visions of Daniel, or of those of the Apocalypse.²

The "Similitudes" are more than suggestive of the prophecy of Zechariah.³

But the passages bearing directly upon the Christian Prophets are to be found in the second Book called "Commands."⁴

"He showed me men sitting upon low benches, and a certain other man sitting in a cushioned chair: and he said to me: Seest those that sit

¹ A.D. 100 c. Harnack and others favour a later date, A.D. 120-145.

² Hermae Pastor, Vis i. 4, ii. 1, 2, 3, &c. Compare Dan. ix. 20, &c.; Rev. i.

³ Compare Dan. ix.; Sim. iii., iv., &c., with Zech. ii., iii., iv., &c.

⁴ Hermae Pastor Mand, xi.

upon benches ? I see, I said, O Lord. These are, said he, the faithful, and he who sits in a cushioned chair is a false Prophet, who ruins the whole understanding of the servants of GOD : of those, that is to say, who are double-minded, not of those who are really faithful. For those double-minded ones come to him as to a divine person, and question him concerning the future. But he who has within him no virtue of the Holy Spirit, speaks to them in accordance with their questions, and gives them answers that he knows are in accordance with their wishes or their business, and fills their minds according to their desires. And since he is himself foolish and vain, to these vain and foolish persons he affirms quite useless things. Whatever, moreover, he has been asked, he answers according to each man's vanity. Nevertheless, he here and there puts in words of truth ; so that he may inflict harm upon some of those who are just and upright.

“Whoever therefore remain strong in the faith of the Lord and are clothed with truth, abstain from conversations of this kind and on no account resort to them. But whoever are double-minded, omen-seekers like the heathen . . . acquire greater faults, being slaves to an empty superstition. For he who questions a Prophet concerning any transaction is void of all truth and prudence. For every spirit given by GOD is not questioned, but having the divine virtue speaks everything of his own accord, because it is from above by virtue of the Holy Spirit. But the spirit that answers questions

according to the will of each individual, is of the earth, and light and without virtue, and does not speak unless it is questioned.

“How, said I, Lord, does a man know which of these is a Prophet, and which a false Prophet ?

“Hear, said he, concerning both.

“By my direction thou shalt know a Prophet ; a false prophet, who has not the Divine Spirit, thou shalt prove by his manner of life.

“For the Prophet who has the Divine Spirit from heaven, is calm and modest, and his wisdom is gentle and well-ordered ; he keeps himself from all the wickedness and the empty pleasures of this world ; he behaves himself very humbly to all men, and if he is questioned says nothing at all, nor does he speak in secret. Neither, moreover, as a man is he so placed, as that the spirit will speak at his own will ; but speech is given to him, when GOD wills him to speak.

“When, therefore, that man, having the Divine Spirit, comes into the assembly of good men having the faith of the Divine Spirit, and the prayer of their congregation is offered before GOD, then the angel of that prophetic spirit, who is set over him, fills the man, and he, filled with the Holy Spirit, speaks with that multitude as the Lord commands.

“So, therefore, is manifested that Holy Spirit. And these are the things which enable you to recognise the virtue of that Holy Spirit.

“Hear now also concerning the earthly spirit, which is light and without virtue, full of folly.

■ First, the man who desires to seem filled with the Divine Spirit, exalts himself, and desires the chief seat. He is proud also and full of words, and lives in much luxury, and in many pleasures, and accepts a reward for his profession, and unless he has received it, keeps silence.

“ But the Prophet having the Holy Spirit does not accept reward ; for he does not choose a Prophet of GOD to do this. In the Prophets, however, accepting reward, the spirit is an earthly spirit. Neither does he come into the assembly of upright men ; but rather joins himself to men who are bad and vain, he speaks in corners, and deludes them by his words, speaking according to the desires of their will, giving vain answers to vain persons ; for an empty vessel when joined to others equally empty is not troubled, but fitly associated, harmonises with them.

“ But when that man comes into the assembly of men upright, and having the spirit which is divine, and speeches are made by them ; that man is found empty, and the earthly spirit which is in him, overcome with terror, flees from him, and he becomes senseless, and altogether broken down, and cannot utter a word.

“ For if in a storehouse you lay up closely old wine, and among the other full vessels you place an empty one, afterwards, when you come to draw out from that same storehouse, you will find the vessel empty as when you placed it there ; so also the Prophets which are empty, when they come among

those who are of the Holy Spirit, will be found such as when they came.

“Thou hast the manner of life of either Prophet. Prove therefore these men both as to their life and actions who say that they are instruments of the Holy Spirit.

“Moreover see that thou give credence to the holy spirit which comes from GOD; and to that earthly and empty spirit thou shalt give no credence, because in it there is no virtue, since it comes from the devil.”

Prophecy is here (circa A.D. 100) accepted as existent and recognised by the Church; but here, again, we find traces of those “false Prophets” who should deceive, if possible, the elect.¹

If the Hermas of “The Shepherd” is the Hermes of S. Paul² (as is implied by Origen, Tertullian, Irenæus and Eusebius), then he may well have known some on whom the gift of Prophecy had been regularly bestowed, but who had neglected or misused the gift until they had become corrupt, and its possessors had become nothing better than “seers” or fortune-tellers. Men had therefore lost their reverence for these Prophets as the interpreters of GOD, and only valued them inasmuch as they could tell them where to look for their lost asses.

Otherwise, it seems as if others beside truly prophetic men were assuming the character, and

¹ S. Mark v. 22.

² Rom. xvi. 14.

imposing upon the weaker members of the Church mere capacity for fortune-telling as a genuine spiritual gift from God.

There can be no question that the true prophetic gift was still held in deepest reverence; but that even more than in S. John's time its truth required to be proved.

Certain definite marks are clearly noted by which the true Prophet is to be distinguished from the false.

Humility, gentleness, self-restraint, are his personal characteristics.

His utterances are to be voluntary, *i.e.*, not elicited by the questions or curiosity of others; and above all, they are to be free from every anticipation of reward. They are to be concerned not with matters of business for mere information; and they are not to be of a private nature, but for the edification of the whole congregation.

Although the power of discerning of spirits may have become rare in the case of individuals, the power still apparently existed in the body of the faithful. At all events, if in any case the prophetic fire had sunk so low that it could not be rekindled by the fervour of other prophetic utterances when the congregation was gathered in the presence of GOD and under the direction of the Holy Spirit, the man, whatever his pretensions, was no longer to be accepted as a Prophet. Unlike the old Prophet of Bethel,¹ the fire in him was dead beyond

¹ 1 Kings xiii. 20, 21.

re-kindling, or else he had never received the Divine Spirit, and sat revealed as an impostor. When called upon to bear his testimony with the rest of the faithful, his silence and confusion betrayed the fact that in spite of his pretensions he had received from God no message to deliver to them.

CHAPTER XII

IT seems to be considered by many that the "Didache," or "Teaching of the Twelve Apostles," must not be dated later than the year A.D. 120, so that it carries us only one step further than "The Shepherd" of Hermas.¹ Still, it is so clear in its statements as to Prophets and Prophecy, that it adds considerably to our understanding the mind of the Church at this period towards them.

In regard to the Apostles and Prophets, according to the decree of the Gospel, so do ye. . . . When the Apostle departeth, let him take nothing except bread enough till he lodge again; but if he ask money, he is a false Prophet. And every Prophet who speaketh in the spirit, ye shall not try nor judge; for every sin shall be forgiven, but this sin shall not be forgiven. But not every one that speaketh in the spirit is a Prophet, but only if he have the ways of the Lord. So from their ways shall the false Prophet and the true Prophet be known. And no Prophet that orders a meal, in the spirit eateth of it; unless indeed he is a false Prophet; and every Prophet who teacheth the

¹ Armitage Robinson puts the *Didache* well on in the course of the second century. See also Turner's *Chronology*.

truth, if he practise not that which he teacheth, is a false Prophet. But every Prophet, proved true, acting with a view to the mystery of the Church on earth, but not teaching others to do all that he himself doeth, shall not be judged among you; for with GOD he hath his judgment; for so did the ancient Prophets also. But whoever, in the spirit, says: Give me money, or something else, ye shall not hear him; but if for others in need he bids you give, let no one judge him.¹

Again: But every true Prophet who will settle among you is worthy of his support . . . Every first fruit, then, of the products of wine-press and threshing-floor, of oxen and of sheep, thou shalt take and give to the Prophets; for they are your High Priests. But if ye have no Prophet, give it to the poor. If thou makest a baking of bread, take the first of it, and give it according to the commandment.² In like manner when thou openest a jar of wine or oil, take the first of it, and give to the Prophets; and of money and clothing, . . . give according to the commandment.

Again: Bishops and Deacons . . . render you the service of the Prophets and Teachers. Despise them not therefore, for they are the ones who are honoured of you, together with the Prophets and Teachers.³

And once more: In the last days false Prophets and corrupters shall be multiplied.⁴

¹ *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles.* Canon Spence. C. xi.

² *ibid.*, c. xiii. ³ *ibid.*, c. xv. ⁴ *ibid.*, c. xvi.

Prophecy, then, evidently still held an honoured place, and although, as we have already gleaned, there were false Prophets to be found, the persons of those possessing the true prophetic gift were held in great reverence,¹ and had a claim upon the community for their support.

They might travel, as the Apostles did, from place to place, or settle down, if they wished, in one spot.²

To treat a Prophet whose truth was evidenced by his conduct and testimony, as though the spirit inspiring him were an evil spirit, and to attempt "exorcism" in such a case, was regarded as the unpardonable sin, being no less than a sin against the Holy Ghost.

Moreover, the whole question as to the position of Prophets in the Church had been carefully considered. Definite rules and regulations had been drawn up for their guidance, and for that of Christian communities. The future deterioration of the gift, and the fact that men would profane it to their own uses, even assuming it for purposes of their own, is clearly foreseen; and warning as clearly given, that what the Master Himself had foretold would certainly come to pass. There is also a tone of distrust in the whole code of regulations. Prophecy is treated as standing altogether on a lower level than that which it occupied in Apostolic days.

¹ *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles.* Canon Spence. Excursus 2.

² *ibid.*, Excursus 7.

CHAPTER XIII

THERE are no allusions to "Prophets," either in the Epistles of Ignatius¹ or S. Polycarp²; nor in that to Diognetus³; nor in the fragments of Papias,⁴ which do not refer to those of the Old Testament, though Ignatius is said to have claimed the gift of Prophecy, and the friends of Polycarp to have described him as "a prophetic teacher."

We hear of a certain Quadratus, living probably in Adrian's time, who is said to have been distinguished for his prophetical gifts.⁵

Justin Martyr writes, that even down to his time⁶ gifts of Prophecy shone forth in the Church.⁷

Irenæus⁸ writes: "As we hear many of the brethren in the Church who have prophetic gifts, and who speak all tongues through the Spirit, and who also bring to light the secret things of men for their benefit; and who expound the mysteries of God."⁹

¹ A.D. 110.

² A.D. 111.

³ A.D. 135.

⁴ A.D. 155.

⁵ Eusebius, *Eccles. Hist.*, Book IV., III., Chapter 37; Book V., Chapter 17.

⁶ A.D. 157.

⁷ Eusebius, *Eccles. Hist.*, Book IV., Chapter 18.

⁸ A.D. 168.

⁹ Eusebius, *Eccles. Hist.*, Book V., Chapter 8.

Melito, Bishop of Sardis,¹ wrote a treatise "On the Conduct of Life, and the Prophets," and another "On Prophecy."²

The definite impression made upon us is, that although the gift of Prophecy had lost much of its first intensity; although, as the Church assumed its settled form and order, this special gift, so far as it was temporary, became a less important element in its life; although failing faith, and its abuse to personal ends, had tended greatly to its discredit; still its "passing" was a slow and gradual process. It might well have continued much longer a recognised and valued element in the life of the Kingdom of God if some crisis of vast moment had not happened, which called for a definite and final judgment; and if this judgment had not gone so far to discredit the existent exercise of the gift by its possessors, as to cause their practical extinction far sooner than might otherwise have been the case.

¹ A.D. 170.

² Eusebius, *Eccles. Hist.*, Book IV., Chapter 26.

CHAPTER XIV

THE question then arises: Did anything occur which could reasonably be described as sufficient to account for what we can only term a complete reversal of the manner in which the Church had hitherto looked upon the Prophets who had played so important a part in her earlier history? We believe that certain events did happen which did not only discredit certain possessors of the gift, but also compelled the Church to take a decisive step to avert a catastrophe which might have overthrown the very foundations on which it was built.

There can be no doubt that already two principles of Church organisation were recognised as supremely important: Apostolic Tradition and Order, and Appeal to the Holy Writings, which, if not already definitely compiled into a Canon, were certainly so far fixed that no further addition might be looked for nor suffered.

In the year A.D. 177 the attention of the Western Church was called to a dispute which had arisen among their fellow-Christians in Asia Minor. A native of Ardabau, a village in Phrygia, had about

the year 157 been converted to Christianity. He was undoubtedly a Mystic, and a man of exalted spiritual character. His main contention was that GOD's supernatural revelation did not end with the Apostles, but that even more wonderful manifestations of the divine energy might be expected under the dispensation of the Paraclete. He claimed that he himself was an inspired organ by whom the Holy Spirit spoke ; and that consequently words of his were uttered, and to be accepted, as the utterances of the Holy Spirit Himself. He claimed the title of Prophet, and spoke in a kind of "possession" or "ecstasy." He held that the relation between a Prophet and the Divine Being who inspired him was the same as that between a musical instrument and him who played upon it ; so that the words of the Prophet were not to be regarded as the words of the speaker, but of GOD Himself. "I have come," he said, "not an Angel, or Ambassador, but GOD the Father."

Two of his female disciples, Prisca, or Priscilla, and Maximilla, fell into strange ecstasies, and delivered what Montanus and his followers regarded as divine prophecies.

These women had been married, had left their husbands, and were ranked by Montanus as virgins in the Church, while they became widely revered as Prophetesses.

But the neighbouring Bishops, well versed in heathen customs, thought that these manifestations savoured far more of the fanatical outbursts which

they had been wont to ascribe to the possession of demons than of any manifestation of the prophetic gift which had previously been recognised among Christians ; and in certain cases they even attempted " exorcism."

This was regarded as a terrible affront by the Montanists, who looked upon the Church leaders as men who did despite to the Spirit of GOD by affronting those whom He had chosen to be His organs for communicating with the Church. The authorities, on the other hand, looked upon the Montanists as those who, disregarding our Lord's warning against false Prophets, wilfully placed themselves under the dominion of the Evil One by accepting as divine teachers women possessed by evil spirits.

There does not seem to have been anything important in the matter of the Montanist " prophecies " with which the Church as a whole found itself in disagreement.

The point in dispute was really from the first as to the different characteristics of real and pretended Prophecy.

This was probably the subject of Bishop Melito's book. This was clearly the subject of that of Miltiades, " How that a Prophet ought not to speak in a state of ecstasy."

Eusebius preserves large portions of a work by Abercius ¹ against Montanus, and the same may be

¹ Bp. of Hierapolis, A.D. 161-180.

said of Epiphanius,¹ who incorporated in his own work on Montanus quotations from previous writers.

The Montanists laid stress upon the condition of "ecstasy" in the case of S. Peter. The orthodox pointed out that in his ecstasy S. Peter did not lose his individual judgment, and was still master of his will.

Still, in spite of the condemnation of Montanus and the excommunication of the Montanists, Montanism spread rapidly. People came from far to witness the wonderful phenomena; while all the leading Bishops of Asia Minor pronounced definitely against it (A.D. 172), until, as we have said, in the year 177 appeal was made to the Western Churches, in the hope that their influence might be won to override the judgment of the Asiatic Churches.

Eusebius, who held Montanism to be "a device of Satan," speaks of this appeal to the Churches of Vienne and Lyons, and describes their response as being "pious and orthodox," which can only be interpreted as adverse to the appellants. At all events the martyrs of Lyons, suffering under the persecution of Aurelius, sent, "for the sake of the peace of the Churches," their own opinion, and that of the Churches of Southern Gaul, to Eleutherius, the then Bishop of Rome, by the hand of Irenæus. It seems that they felt strongly as to the importance of the question, and as there might appear on the face of it no special reason why an

¹ Salamis, A.D. 367-403.

exceptional manifestation of spiritual power should not have arisen in the Church of Asia Minor, they wished the matter to be frankly represented to the chief Bishop of the West, in order that there might arise no such scandal as that countenance should be given by the head of Western Christendom to practices already carefully considered and condemned by their Asiatic brethren.

At Rome the Asiatic Churches took care that their case should be stated before the Western world by one of their most eminent Bishops—Claudius Apollinarius, of Hierapolis—with the result that the Roman Church approved the sentence of the Asiatic Bishops, and Montanism became an actual schism, its adherents being definitely cut off from the Churches of East and West.¹

¹ See Murray's *Dict. of Christian Biography*, Art. Montanus.

CHAPTER XV

THE subsequent history of Montanism is mostly derived from the fragments of two writers preserved by Eusebius: the one anonymous,¹ the other Apollonius of Ephesus, who lived forty years after the rise of Montanism.

Although Montanus did not live long to preside over his sect, the heresy, under various names, mostly the name of its leader for the time being,² existed in Asia, certainly during the first half of the third century.

Serapion, Bishop of Antioch,³ wrote against certain Montanist teachers who had made their way as far as Antioch.

In the third century also it became necessary to decide what course to take with regard to the baptism of those converts from Montanism who were returning to the fold of the Catholic Church.

¹ Identified by Dr. Salmon with Abercius. See Art. Abercius, Murray's *Dict. of Christian Biography*; and by E. C. Selwyn with Apollinaris. *The Christian Prophets*, c. ii.

² The Sectaries called themselves "pneumatikoi," Spiritual; and the adherents of the Church, "psuchikoi," Carnal.

³ A.D. 190-203.

The feeling with regard to the heresy may be gauged by the fact that, although the matter and form of Montanist baptism were perfectly regular, and although in all essentials their doctrines did not differ from those of the Church, it was decided that their baptism could not be recognised, since the heresy was the "outcome of a lying spirit."¹

This decision seems to be only the expression of the general feeling, so entirely had the Catholics ceased to regard the Montanists as Christian brethren.

We are told that when persecution by the common enemy threw confessors of both bodies together, the orthodox persevered until their final martyrdom in refusing to hold any intercourse with their Montanist fellow-sufferers, as dreading to hold any friendship "with the lying spirit who animated them."² All this is evidence of the vital issues which were understood to be bound up with the Montanist views of Prophecy, and the tremendous importance attached to the adverse decisions of the Church with respect to them.

In the West the matter never seems to have attained to great importance. At Rome the whole case brought before Eleutherius appears to have been forgotten, and no Montanist teacher to have arrived there until the episcopate of Zephyrinus,³ when Montanism was formally condemned.

The only great success to be chronicled for the

¹ Firmilian's Letter to Cyprian, A.D. 256.

² Eusebius, *Eccles. Hist.*, Book V., Chapter 16.

³ A.D. 198-217.

Montanism is the acquisition of Tertullian, and the heresy, which by its very nature had raised questions of the highest importance, divided and subdivided by the differing tenets of those who had professed it, passed away unnoticed and for the time forgotten, as other, and as it seemed more pressing, problems arose to absorb the energies of the rulers and the ruled in the Churches of East and West.

CHAPTER XVI

It might seem at first sight that the Church acted with unnecessary rigour against Montanus and his followers ; but it is quite easy to understand that it could not regard Montanism as a mere harmless error on the part of certain earnest, if misguided, persons ; who themselves longing for a severer rule of life and being disposed to mysticism, mistook the hysterical outbursts of their religious emotions for the direct influence of the Holy Spirit.

The actual questions raised were of really vital importance, and it is also clear that those in authority found in the lives of its professors other causes for condemning it. Something of this may be gathered from the writings of The Anonymous quoted by Eusebius.¹

After saying how he had dreaded to write against the heresy, then called after Miltiades,² lest he "should appear to give any new injunctions, or to add anything to the doctrine of the New Testament, which it is impossible that any resolved to live

¹ Eusebius, *Eccles. Hist.*, Book V., Chapter 16.

² See Chapter 15.

according to the Gospel should add to or diminish," he goes on to give an account of the result of his inquiries at Pontus in Galatia, which was much troubled by the New Prophecy. He tells how in Phrygia a recent convert, Montanus, "in the excessive desire of his soul to take the lead," (may we charitably add, possibly having a keen desire to establish in the Church a stricter discipline and a severer rule of life?), "was carried away in spirit, and wrought up in a certain kind of frenzy and irregular ecstasy, raving, and speaking, and uttering strange things; and proclaiming what was contrary to the institutions that had prevailed in the Church, as handed down and preserved in succession from the earliest times."

He goes on to speak of the two women who were "excited by him, and also spoke in a kind of frenzy, out of all propriety, and in a manner strange and novel."

He tells of the conferences of the faithful and their condemnation of the novel doctrines.

He appeals to the abstinence on the part of the Church from any violent measures. "Therefore," says he, "since they call us slayers of the Prophets, because we did not promptly receive those talkative teachers, pretending that they were those whom the Lord promised to send to His people, let them tell us in the Name of God, O friends, which of those who began prating, from Montanus and his women, is there that suffered persecution or was slain by the impious. None. Not even one has

been seized and crucified for the Name (of Christ). None at all. No one of their women was ever scourged in the synagogues of the Jews or stoned. No, never."

The Anonymous, apparently, is not only vindicating the Church from the charge of oppression, but is suggesting that they, the Montanists, had not proved by their suffering that they were "the Prophets" of whom Christ spoke in the passage they had quoted.¹

He alludes to their refusal to submit to the test of exorcism, and goes on to refute the predictions by Maximilla of wars and political convulsions. "Has not," he says, "the falsity of this been made obvious? For it is now more than thirteen years since the woman died, and neither has there been a partial nor a general war."

He quotes from another work by the historian Miltiades, enumerating those who had prophesied under the New Testament.

"But the false Prophet," says he, "is carried away by a vehement ecstasy, accompanied by want of all shame and fear; beginning, indeed, with a designed ignorance, and terminating, as before said, in involuntary madness. They will never be able to show that any in the Old or New Testament were thus violently agitated and carried away in spirit. Neither will they be able to boast that Agabus, or Judas, or Silas, or the daughters of

¹ S. Matt. xxiii. 34.

Philip, or Ammias in Philadelphia, or Quadratus, or others that did not belong to them, ever acted in this way."

Again he says: "If, after Quadratus and Ammias in Philadelphia, the women that followed Montanus succeeded in the gift of Prophecy, let them show us what women among them succeeded Montanus and his women. For the Apostle shows that the gift of Prophecy should be in all the Church until the coming of the Lord, but they can by no means show any one at this time, the fourteenth year from the death of Maximilla." ¹

¹ Eusebius, *Eccles. Hist.*, Book V., Chapter 17.

CHAPTER XVII

STILL more to the point are certain quotations from a work by Apollonius against Montanus, also preserved by Eusebius.¹

“But who,” says he, “is this new teacher? (Montanus.) His works and his doctrines sufficiently shew. This is he that taught the dissolutions of marriage; he that imposed laws of fasting; that called Pepuza and Tymium, little places in Phrygia, a Jerusalem, in order to collect men from every quarter thither; who established exactors of money, and under the name of offerings devised the artifice to receive presents; who provided salaries for those who are preaching his doctrine, that they might grow strong by gormandising and gluttony.”

Again he says: “We shew that these same leading Prophetesses, as soon as they were filled with the spirit, abandoned their husbands; how then can they utter this falsehood who call Prisca a virgin?”

“Does it not,” he proceeds, “appear to you the Scripture forbids any Prophet to receive gifts or money? When, therefore, I see a Prophetess

¹ Eusebius, *Eccles. Hist.*, Book V., Chapter 18.

receiving both gold and silver and precious garments, how can I fail to reject her ? ” “ Although the Lord has said, ‘ Lay not up for yourselves gold or silver, nor two coats,’ these, in direct opposition, have committed great crimes in regard to the possession of these things thus prohibited. For we shall shew that those that are called martyrs and Prophets among them have derived pecuniary gain, not only from the wealthy, but from the poor, and from widows and orphans ; and if they have any confidence (of innocence) in this, let them stand and settle these matters with us ; so that, if they are convicted, they may abandon their misdemeanours hereafter.”

Again : “ The fruits of a Prophet must be examined, for by his fruits the tree is known. But those who wish may understand the circumstances respecting this Alexander :¹ he was tried by Æmilius Frontinus, the Proconsul (of Asia) at Ephesus, not for the Name (of Christian), but for the robberies which he dared to commit, as he had already been a transgressor. Then, however, pretending to the Name of the Lord, he was liberated, after he had spread his errors there among the faithful. But the Church of the place whence he sprung would not receive him, because he was a robber. Those, however, that wish to learn his history can consult the public archives of Asia. And yet the Prophet pretends to be ignorant of

¹ Claimed by the Montanists as a martyr.

this man, with whom he lived many years. By refuting him we also overturn the pretensions of the Prophet. The same thing could be shewn in many others; and if they have the courage, let them undergo the test of argument."

And again: "If," says he, "they deny that their Prophets took presents, let them at least acknowledge that if they should be proved to have received them they are no Prophets. And of these matters we will furnish a thousand proofs. But it is necessary that all the fruits of a Prophet should be examined. Tell me, does a Prophet dye (his hair)? Does a Prophet stain (his eyelids)? Does a Prophet delight in ornaments? Does a Prophet play with tablets and dice? Does he take usury? Let them first acknowledge these things, whether they are right or not, and I will shew that they have been done by them."

CHAPTER XVIII

DR. SALMON¹ points out that the powerful advocacy of Tertullian² tended to prolong the existence of Montanism; but it was a Montanism changed and modified in form, and it was some time before his appeal to the visions and ecstatic utterances of certain Prophetesses in support of his views, drew upon him the sentence of excommunication. Optatus, Bishop of Milevis in Numidia, who wrote A.D. 365-378, speaks of Montanism as an extinct heresy, which it were slaying the slain to refute.³ Still there were some who called themselves "Tertullianists" in the fourth century, whose church at Carthage was surrendered to the Catholics when the last of them returned to the bosom of the Church.

So Montanism disappeared in the West.

In the East, Sozomen⁵ ascribes the extinction of the Montanists to the edict of Constantine, except in Phrygia, where they were still numerous in his

¹ Art. Montanus, Murray's *Dict. of Christian Biography*.

² A.D. 200-223.

³ Optatus con. Don. I. 9.

⁴ Augustin Haer, 86.

⁵ A.D. 440 C.

time.¹ At last Justinian crushed out the remains of the sect in Phrygia, and the Montanists in despair gathered, with their wives and children, into their places of worship, set them on fire, and thus perished.²

¹ Sozomen, *Eccles. Hist.*, Book II., Chapter 32, Book VII., Chapter 18.

² A.D. 527-567. See Art. Montanus, Murray's *Dict. of Christian Biography*.

CHAPTER XIX

It still remains to consider what effect this important, if not extensive, disturbance had upon the use and place of Prophets in the Catholic Church.

As we have seen, there was nothing in the so-called "prophecies" of the Montanists which the Church need necessarily condemn as incompatible with Christian doctrine.

What aroused the storm of opposition was the claim that utterances in a state of ecstasy, when the speaker was but the organ of an external force, must be accepted as a true manifestation of the power of the Holy Ghost.

This was contrary to Apostolic Order, which made the prophetic speaker subject to Apostolic discipline, and laid down the rule that the spirit of the Prophet must be subject to the Prophet himself, so that he could control and modify his own utterances.

It was not merely the question whether the condition of trance could not, at all events at times, accompany a manifestation of the Divine Spirit, but whether this condition of ecstasy, apparently not easily distinguishable from the ecstasy of

heathen religions, could warrant the extreme claim of Montanism: that the words of the speaker must be accepted and revered as the words of God Himself.

The point was not a new one. It had been considered and settled.¹ It was not "Prophecy," but the conditions of Prophecy laid down by Montanus, that were condemned, as in the first place contrary to the Apostolic Order of the Church.

Certain matters of Church discipline, such as the duration and methods of Fasting, and second Marriages, which had been brought under discussion, had never been considered as outside the discretion of the Church itself. Such were to be regulated as occasion and circumstance might demand by the Bishops in their several dioceses. But if the claims of the new "Prophetesses" were allowed, their ruling in such matters became obligatory, as being definite expressions of the divine will. There could be no liberty, such as S. Paul claimed in matters desirable but not essential. Not to take a bath or to eat a grape during the two weeks preceding the Paschal fast became as manifestly a divine command as "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

No wonder that the "New Prophecy," with its possibility of constant disturbance and utter subversion of established authority and order, made the very word "Prophecy" suspect.

¹ See Chapters 8, 12, 13.

But the question involved wider and deeper issues. If the teaching of Montanus were right, then the canon of Holy Scripture could not be considered as closed ; nay, there could never be a time when some new revelation by the mouths of the Prophets could not alter or override any preceding revelation.

There could thus be no final appeal to history or tradition, no rock of unchangeable truth on which the foundations of the Church could rest.

The idea of an Apostolic and historic Catholic Church was in danger of being exchanged for that of a baseless and constantly varying structure ; while the faith once for all delivered to the Saints, might be changed, modified, or even superseded, by the words of any man or woman, who by virtue of ecstatic conditions might claim for them the authority of God Himself.

The "Prophecies" of Montanus and Maximilla had evidently been committed to writing. Hippolytus says that the Montanists "have an infinity of books of those Prophets whose words they neither examine by reason, nor give heed to those who can, but are carried away by their indiscriminating faith in them, thinking that they learn through their means something more than from the Law, the Prophets and the Gospels." ¹

By the Montanists these would be regarded as a newer and more binding revelation of the divine

¹ Eusebius, *Eccles. Hist.*, Book III., Chapter 16.

will, to which the former must of necessity give way.

Certain definite results of this controversy then appear to have been: first, that the Churches published more widely lists of the Holy Scriptures already accepted as canonical; secondly, that probably writings like "The Shepherd" of Hermas and the 1st Epistle of Clemens Romanus, which had hitherto been popular and had a place in Church reading, were henceforth formally excluded;¹ and thirdly, that the appeal to Christian tradition, and especially to the Sacred Writings, assumed a fresh and increased importance, while the office of what we should call Preaching and Teaching became more strictly the prerogative of the Bishop, only to be exercised by his authority and personal commission.

¹ Council of Carthage, A.D. 349; Council of Laodicea, A.D. 365.

CHAPTER XX

APART from the fact that the New Prophecy had proved its incompatibility with a permanent and settled Kingdom of GOD, based upon Apostolic Order, and with an appeal to the written tradition of acknowledged spiritual authority, there was really nothing which called for the retention or cultivation of the special gift of Prophecy in the attenuated and doubtful form which it had latterly assumed.

We noted Bishop Cotterill's opinion that Prophecy was at first essentially evidential, witnessing to the divine source of the Apostolic message and commission ; and that, although special supernatural action of the Spirit might be called for in the creation of the Church, as in the creation of the universe, the Church, like the universe, when once its permanent order was complete, was to develop to its perfection by force of the spiritual forces conferred upon it, according to the universal laws of development.

In the third century the Church had certainly outgrown the necessity for special supernatural intervention of this kind.

We can see also how the continuation of such extraordinary powers as those of Prophecy and Miracles, appealing to the lower rather than to the higher phases of human nature, however useful in the earliest days of the new Kingdom, could hardly find in it a permanent place without interfering with the regular and orderly development of the Church. Such manifestations must of necessity override reason ; whereas in the Church of the redeemed, the service of GOD must be a " reasonable " service.

At the same time we must recognise that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Church, and its orderly transmission, is not affected by considerations like these.

One special manifestation of spiritual power, working in a certain way, might well be directed into another channel ; or concentrated in one or other of the regular Orders. The spiritual gifts should not be reckoned as lost because they were manifested by other persons or in a different way.

It seems beyond question that all the best and highest and most permanent features of the " charisma prophēteias " had quite early been absorbed into the regular order and ministry of the Church. For instance, those prophetic characteristics which in Moses, or Samuel, or Elijah, or Isaiah, or the Apostles, made them founders and builders, organisers and directors, of nations or societies, seem now to have been regarded as belonging to the Episcopal Order ; though the recognition of these characteristics was

not allowed to obscure the fact that Presbyters, also through the "laying on of hands," were partakers of the divine gifts, and must be consulted in the direction of spiritual affairs.

This must have been apparent long before the claims of the New Prophecy brought about a final crisis of the Church.

Or again, the prophetic power of exhortation and spiritual insight, the powers of conviction, and interpretation of the Scriptures, of conversion of unbelievers, and edification of the faithful, undoubtedly continued in the ministry of preaching.

So we find that preaching was one of the chief offices of a Bishop. Presbyters preached as the Bishop's proper assistants, but only when commissioned by him as duly, that is, spiritually as well as mentally qualified. Deacons were allowed to read the Homilies of the Fathers, or the lessons of the Scriptures, but the office of preaching was a spiritual one, depending upon the transmission of the special spiritual gift, and only in the lesser churches of the city, and the country about, was the office even devolved upon Presbyters.¹

S. Chrysostom says: "Other qualifications, such as these: 'He must be sober, vigilant, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, etc.,' may be found in subjects; but because a Bishop ought to have those qualifications that belong to rulers, the Apostle therefore added, 'He must be apt to

¹ Bingham's *Christian Antiquities*, Book XIV., Chapter 4.

teach,' for this is not required of subjects ; but is most especially required of those who have the office of governing committed to them." ¹

And again : " S. Paul converted the world, not so much by his miracles, as by his continual preaching ; and therefore a Bishop must be able to exhort by sound doctrine. . . . He that knows not how to oppose the enemy . . . as he knows not how to teach sound doctrine, so he ought to be far from the teaching throne." ²

The Bishop's throne is evidently called the throne of teaching, because preaching sound doctrine was so essentially a part of the Bishop's office that he could not be without it.

The Bishops, then, were the teachers of clergy and people.

It was their office to expound the Scriptures.

And the office of preaching was a spiritual office, depending upon the transmission of the spiritual gift.

It would certainly seem that as a matter of fact, the work of the Prophet, as well as that of the Pastor and Teacher, had become absorbed in the Episcopal office, as at first it had been contained in the attributes of an Apostle, to be by him devolved upon those Presbyters whom he considered qualified spiritually as well as intellectually to receive it.

The fact was, that in a Church so richly endowed with spiritual powers, there was no longer place

¹ S. Chrysostom, Hom. X. in 1 Tim. 3.

² S. Chrysostom, Hom. II. in Tit.

for special spiritual conditions which had doubtless been of the utmost evidential value in the earlier days of its existence.

Montanism had admirably proved that the result of such conditions, had they continued, would be the subversion of settled Apostolic order, and the overthrow of the Christian Tradition. This is not to say that fasting and meditation might not in certain cases lead in any age to a further insight into the spiritual world. A special Vision, or a special Miracle, is not an impossible or an incredible thing. Impossibility cannot be asserted of the workings of GOD; and credibility is entirely a matter of evidence. But as a regular part of a great system; a Kingdom in which there was to be no confusion, no disorder, but due subordination of the members; and edification of the whole Body by the unity of its life and action; an intermittent and extraordinary gift like the Prophecy of the Apostolic Church could scarcely find a permanent place.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit, bestowed in the first place upon the Apostles, and through them upon the several members of the Church according to their need or place, were still so full and abundant; all that was most precious in Prophecy was still so manifestly preserved; that the point which appealed to the popular mind, that of foretelling future events, could well be spared, and might even have tended to obscure the higher vision of the Saints, and to encourage the mere wonder-seekers of the world.

CHAPTER XXI

BUT since it would appear that although Prophets, as a separate class of men, disappeared from the settled organisation of the Church ; while the most valuable elements of Prophecy were still among the spiritual gifts attached to the Episcopal Office, as they were to the High Priesthood of the Jewish Church ; and were, in the usual way, transmitted to Presbyters ; it is natural to ask whether we are to conclude, that the foretelling of future events, undoubtedly looked upon as a striking attribute of Prophecy, may no longer be looked on in the Church as a manifestation of divine power.

Again, we must remember, that it is not a question of whether GOD might not at any time bestow such a gift, under His own conditions ; but whether we are to include under Christian Prophecy such predictions as were not uncommon in the middle ages, or such outbursts as in more modern times have accompanied the efforts of revivalist preachers. The question of mediæval prophecies has been treated at length by Dr. Döllinger in his book, " Prophecies and the Prophetic Spirit in the Christian

Era.”¹ Those who desire to study the matter in detail may be referred to this work. But, briefly, his decision is distinctly against those who either themselves claimed the prophetic gift, or on whose behalf it has been claimed on the ground of their power of prediction.

It must be remembered that the popular mind is eager for prognostication of all kinds; and not indisposed to admit the claims of any who profess the gift: as witness the crystal gazers, and palmists, of every generation, not excluding our own.

Then, again, men, and especially perhaps those with the gift of eloquence, are apt, often unconsciously, to make the wish the father to the thought; and in pointing out the possible results of present causes, to make the picture tally with their own conceptions; or, at all events, to mistake for a supernatural vision the outcome of their own natural mentality.

Again, we must always allow the essential difference between supernatural insight, and the result of the possession of a vivid imagination, highly cultivated, as in the case of a real poet, historian or scientist, and accompanied by an intellect well developed and fully instructed.

Thus, no one would ascribe any supernatural power to an eminent statesman, who, with skilled

¹ See Dr. Döllinger's *Prophecies and the Prophetic Spirit in the Christian Era*. Preface by Dr. Plummer.

judgment, correctly portrayed the future condition of a nation whose destinies were being moulded by a certain well-ascertained sequence of current events. Nor need a poet of the middle nineteenth century of necessity have been gifted with divine power because he :

“ Dipt into the future far as human eye could see ;
 Saw the Vision of the world, and all the wonder that
 would be ;
 Saw the heavens fill with commerce, argosies of magic
 sails,
 Pilots of the purple twilight, dropping down with costly
 bales ;
 Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and there rained
 a ghastly dew
 From the nations’ airy navies grappling in the central
 blue ;
 Far along the world-wide whisper of the south-wind
 rushing warm,
 With the standard of the peoples plunging through the
 thunder-storm ;
 Till the war-drum throb’d no longer, and the battle-
 flags were furl’d
 In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world.
 There the common-sense of most shall hold a fretful
 realm in awe,
 And the kindly earth shall slumber, lapt in universal
 law.”

These are only the words of a master of rhythmic speech, allowing his trained imagination to play upon the actual knowledge which was well within the range of all cultivated men in his place and generation.

But we must go further still, and say, there are certainly many phases of foresight with which we are very slightly acquainted, and with which, as with what is called "second-sight," we can only deal as at present beyond the scope of our actual knowledge. But these have, so far as we know, nothing distinctly Christian about them; and in the future we shall probably find, as we have found in other matters, that they are only a special development of certain natural forces.

In his book, Dr. Döllinger lays down certain rules, or tests, which he shows were not complied with in the cases of mediæval prophecies.

Either they dealt with unworthy or trivial matters, or they were, so to speak, the translation of a man's own ideas into prophetic form; or they were such as in the case of a statesman or poet might be uttered by any specially gifted or far-sighted man. But, whether in the case of religion or common life, there was not that element which could warrant their claiming, or having claimed for them, the divine power, or could lift them to the level of Christian Prophecy.

We are left, then, with the question of Prophecy as continued in the matter of inspired preaching.

No one, we presume, would question the fact, that the gifts of convincing eloquence, of lucid exposition of the Scriptures, of the power to convert unbelievers, and to edify believers, of wide and statesmanlike grasp of the needs of the Church; have in certain individuals been so evidently

bestowed, as to make them stand out above others in the history of the Catholic Church.

Only to recall a few well-known names : S. Benedict, S. Anselm, S. Francis Xavier, Savonarola, or to come nearer to our own times, Bishop Ken, Wesley, Pusey, Keble, Liddon, Church ; must we not say that each had his gift of organisation or direction ; was a director of the thought of his age, or proved a power for the conversion of unbelievers, and the edification of the faithful ?

The charisma then exists. These were prophetic men ; possessors of the prophetic gift, imparted by the "laying on of hands." In some it was manifested more fully ; or was more carefully cultivated ; in some it developed in certain directions more fully than in others ; always as the Church required, the Spirit dividing to each one severally as He willed.

And we cannot stop here. Are we to regard these men as altogether exceptional, or are they merely illustrious examples of a regular order of things ?

Our feeling is that the latter is the truer explanation. That, for instance, the preaching office, which we have seen was especially and in the first place an Apostolical, and afterwards an Episcopal prerogative, was and is always, transmitted to Presbyters ; as in our own office for the ordination of Priests ; where the Bishop delivering the Bible into the hands of the kneeling postulant, says : "Take thou Authority to preach the Word

of God, and to minister the holy Sacraments in the congregation, where thou shalt be lawfully appointed thereto.”¹

The “potestas,” whether “*praedicandi*,” or “*administrandi*,” is certainly not a mere permission,

¹ “*Accipe potestatem praedicandi verbum Dei et administrandi sancta Sacramenta, in congregationem in qua fueris ad hoc legitime constitutus.*” *Liber Precum Publicarum Ecclesiae Anglicanae.* Bright and Medd.

It is surely a matter of indifference that the actual word used in our present English Ordinal is “authority,” and not “power”; seeing that the sentence quoted is added to that accompanying the laying on of hands by the Bishop, and the reception on the part of the Priest of the gift of the Holy Ghost for his special work in the Church of God. No one would speak of the grace of Orders then conferred as a mere licence or permission; and not as a sacramental gift. And that gift includes the power to preach the Word of God, as well as to administer the Sacraments. A more than natural “power” is required for either. In fact, the ancient use (*see* Edward VIth’s First Prayer-Book) was that the Bishop delivered to the Ordinand, “the Bible in the one hande, and the Chalice or cupp with the breide, in the other hande,” saying: “Take thou authoritie to preache the word of god, and to minister the holy Sacramentes in thys congregations, where thou shalt be so appointed.” While, as if to emphasise the connection of the gift of “power” to celebrate the Holy mysteries with that to preach the word, the preceding Benediction ran: “receive the holy goste, whose synnes thou doest retaine, thei are retained; and be thou a faithful despenser of the word of god and of his holy Sacramentes.” The point however lies in the fact, that the promise to the Apostles was of “power” through the coming of the Holy Ghost; and that the gifts of the Spirit conferred on others by the laying on of their hands were gifts of “power,” and not of authority, in its limited meaning.

or licence¹; it is a power, or spiritual unction, and gift conferred on such as devoutly and in faith seek it. The gift of Prophecy is one of its best and most important aspects.

Of course it is a gift given to profit withal. It may be neglected or misused, or uncultivated. A fear like that of Jonah, a shrinking like that of Jeremiah, may keep the faithless Prophet silent. But surely the man of simple faith, speaking not his own message, but the message that he is sent to deliver, may believe that he will be given "a mouth and wisdom"; may claim his right to be heard as the "ambassador of Christ"; and take comfort that in spite of his mortal weakness, whether in ministering the "Mysteries of God," or in preaching and expounding the word, the "power" is not his own, but that of the Spirit who dwelleth in him, and is one of the sacred graces of his ordination.²

¹ Ordination is clearly of the nature of a Sacrament, as it consists of an "outward and visible sign," whereby an "inward and spiritual grace" or gift is conveyed. Ordination not only sets men apart for ministerial work, but it conveys the distinct and definite gift necessary for that work. Whitham, *Holy Orders*, p. 80. *See also* p. 92, &c.,

² 1 Tim. iv. 14.

CHAPTER XXII

DOES not the conclusion of the preceding chapter contradict what we have previously said? Are we not thereby bound to admit that in the Church the danger still exists of those very disorders which Montanism was the means of bringing to a crisis, and in the end of subduing? What is to prevent men on whom the prophetic gift in its modified form has been regularly conferred from claiming to be the organs of a New Prophecy, independent alike of all human authority, and of all tradition, oral or written, of the Church? The answer is, that by the merciful providence of GOD, the danger has been already once for all recognised, encountered and provided against.

It may be safely said that now and always there are clear and definite conditions which must be complied with by the claimant to prophetic gifts, before the latter can be admitted as the outcome of a true as opposed to a false Spirit.

There must, for example, be no contravention of Apostolic Order, or authority.

If any man claims to be a Prophet, or Spiritual, he must be subordinate to the authority of that

Episcopal Order which is at once the guarantee of unity, and the appointed means for the transmission of the spiritual graces, by which all regular ministries of the Church are endowed with spiritual efficacy.¹ There must be no such ecstatic condition as overrides personal consciousness. Thought and will must be under due restraint. Every utterance, however inspired, must be in direct co-operation with the understanding of the speaker.

That can be no true prophetic gift which fails to acknowledge the perfect divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, with all that it entails as to the divine authority of His Word and Sacraments, and the divine origin of the Faith embodied in the Catholic Creeds.

There can be no true Prophecy which can contradict or supersede the canonical Scriptures of the Church. Not only must the Written Word be always the fixed and final appeal in all matters of disputed doctrine, and the only absolute authority in matters necessary to eternal salvation ; but while "exposition and interpretation," the setting forth the bearing of GOD's work in and for men, giving further insight into the mysteries of the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Resurrection, the Ascension, in short, the whole work of the Christ, is to be reckoned among the most valuable manifestations of modern Prophecy, there can be no divine power behind an exposition, which demands the sweeping

¹ 2 Tim i. 7.

away for convenience' sake, of any of the central facts which form the basis of the Christian tradition.

But granted these conditions, which are as old as the Church, and which were only reasserted in the third and fourth centuries, it is not difficult to admit that prophetic gifts may still exist, not only without danger, but wholly to the benefit of the Church at large.

It is certainly easier to believe that Prophets, having a separate function or office, proved incompatible with the settled order of the Catholic Church and passed ; that their particular work was no longer necessary ; and therefore those gifts which were concentrated for a time in their persons found place and scope in other directions ; than to believe that those gifts were wholly and for ever withdrawn.

It is difficult to believe that in spite of there being no definite pronouncement to that effect on the part of the Church, we must refuse to recognise prophetic men, however splendidly they may manifest one or more of the prophetic gifts.

It is difficult to believe that a manifestation of spiritual life which played so great a part in the history of the older Israel of GOD, and which was the connecting link between the Old and New Testaments, was after the lapse of only two centuries to be wholly withdrawn ; and that in this respect the High Priests of the Jewish Church were at least at an advantage with those who should sit in the seats of the Apostles, inasmuch as the Apostles themselves bore witness to the prophetic gifts of the High Priests.

Are we to say, that in face of our Lord's words, which were certainly understood to imply that Prophets were to be found in the Church through all the ages (as could hardly fail to be the case if He Himself is with the Church, which is His Body), we hold that this one manifestation of divine power, by every one recognised as stamped with the divine seal, was but one of the splendours of its dawning, destined to vanish like the splendour of the dawn?

Is there one of the gifts of Prophecy, apart from mere prediction, which we could afford to be without?

Are they not rather of the essence of the Church's life?

Unrealised, they leave a body, existing indeed, but with all its best spiritual cravings unsatisfied, and its vital energies impaired.

Realised, it is GOD who by His Holy Spirit lives in the Body of His SON.

The Church, instructed, edified, and comforted, is to the unbeliever a means by which he is reprovcd, convicted, and reconciled; so that "falling down on his face, he will worship GOD, declaring that He is amongst us indeed"; to the believer, a manifest and perpetual token of His Power and Presence Who said: "Lo, I am with you always, even to the consummation of the age."

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